

WORKFORCE & QUALITY ISSUE BRIEF

To: Members of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care

Prepared by: Workforce & Quality Workgroup

ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) are the “brain builders” of the next generation.¹ Partnering with families in their child’s early learning experiences requires complex competencies to understand child development, support children’s mental health, detect developmental delays, and help build resilience. Connecticut must make significant progress to equitably compensate and support the professional growth of ECEs in ways commensurate with the indispensable role they play for children and families.

As Connecticut considers how to build a high-quality, sustainable, and equitable early childhood education system, it is essential to recognize the complexity of the knowledge and skills required with professional compensation structures. Low wages have severely impacted ECE recruitment and retention, and add to the state’s child care shortage. In Connecticut, ECEs in OEC-funded programs that work outside of the public school system make between \$15-\$20/hour, while those who work at non-OEC-funded programs typically make less.² Fourteen percent of Connecticut ECEs live in poverty. These low wages are paired with long hours, physically and emotionally demanding work, lack of access to paid time off, limited health insurance, virtually no retirement benefits and are disproportionately experienced by women of color.

Despite decisive science that points to the importance of ECEs possessing pedagogical knowledge of child development, credentials and degrees are often elusive and rarely tied to recognition, career advancement or salary changes. Connecticut has a complex and non-uniform degree and credentialing system. The OEC must work with the State Departments of Education and Labor to develop simplified, clear pathways to degrees and credentials. One key long term strategy is adopting the [Unifying Framework \(UF\)](#) with the aligned [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#) which were both adopted in 2020 by a national taskforce convened by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The UF has created a formalized, professional field of practice for ECEs, and centered the lack of compensation and benefits as the number one barrier to progress. It recommended the unwinding of complexity in states and created three distinct and aligned levels to the profession, licensing ECEs to practice: **The ECE I**—a credential that requires 120 training hours, the **ECE II**—requiring an associate’s degree and the **ECE III**—requiring a bachelor’s degree or masters degree³. This framework vastly simplifies the professional development and credential structure in Connecticut, ensuring compensation can be more easily tied to competencies and that the state does not spend money on designing individualized and complex PD systems.⁴

In order to provide quality early care for these families, the state simply cannot skip over the adults in the middle. This brief outlines how the state can create a high-quality, fairly compensated, and diverse ECE workforce, and in turn deliver high-quality care for children. While recommending where we need to go, our recommendations also ensure that we prioritize the needs of the existing workforce, who are already

¹ “Experiences Build Brain Architecture,” Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (Accessed [here](#))

² 2022 OEC NIEER report submission (Accessed [here](#))

³ See “Key Terms” section of this brief for definitions of each of these designations

⁴ The Unifying Framework aims to create a professionalized career path similar to those for nursing, which includes Certified Nursing Assistants, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Registered Nurses.

providing critical care.

As explained in further detail in this Section IV of this brief, the workgroup has **three central recommendations**:

1. **Compensation:** Adopt the three levels defined in the Unifying Framework (ECE I,II,III) and tie meaningful compensation increases to these levels, while creating clear pathways to ensure the existing workforce is not left behind in this transition.
2. **Professional Pathways and Technical Assistance:** Building on the existing supports offered by the OEC's Registry and Elevate Quality Improvement System, design and deliver a credentialing and certification system that aligns with the Unifying Framework goals, and provides ongoing technical assistance to early childhood settings and staff.
3. **Recruitment and Retention:** Expand opportunities and marketing strategies to both attract new individuals to the field and retain current educators, and build community based knowledge about the importance of the early years and this work.

For too long we have devalued and underpaid an indispensable workforce that is integral to our children's growth and development and upon which our larger state workforce depends. There are no shortcuts or work-arounds. In order to improve the quality of early care and education, we must first address the needs and compensation of the adults who serve our state's children.

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I. HOW TO USE THIS BRIEF

This brief aims to prepare the Blue Ribbon Panel (BRP) to make informed recommendations related to the ECE Workforce. The first section, Problems and Opportunities in Workforce and Quality, provides context on the current state of CT's early care and education workforce. The next section, Workforce and Quality Guide Posts, reviews key documents created by previous CT task forces and national leaders in the field that guide this workgroup's thinking and recommendations. **The primary section (Section IV) outlines the workgroup's goals and recommendations to reach those goals.** The appendices provide deeper context as referenced in these sections.

As the Panel reads this brief, the workgroup requests that they keep in mind the following:

- **Implementation of any recommendations would take time to phase in**, and the recommendations included here do not yet put forth a detailed plan for implementation.
- **Compensation strategies must come first.** If not addressed, the other recommendations would only reinforce existing issues. We are stressing the primacy of compensation as key to all other recommendations. Compensation strategies are inextricably linked to recommendations from the funding workgroup. Programs' fiscal conditions impact their ability to compensate staff. **The BRP will need to consider how to enable permanent, sustainable pathways to fair compensation in ECE settings as a long-term goal.**
 - The first step, within the state's control, is addressing compensation in **state-funded programs**. The OEC only has rule-setting authority over state-funded and subsidized programs, so state compensation strategies can influence, but not control, private market compensation practices.
- Recommendations need to **ensure the existing workforce is identified, recognized, preserved and valued for its diversity**, particularly in the phasing in of the NAEYC Unifying Framework.
- **Simplifying the credentialing and professional development system**, and using existing **national benchmarks/systems** are guiding principles of this work.
- **Inter-agency collaboration** as well as funding will be necessary to move this work forward. There will be state infrastructure needs to oversee any new approaches or programs.
 - For example, the Department of Education oversees some public school preschools and OEC funds some as well. The two agencies' credentialing systems will need to be aligned.

The workgroup is grateful for the thoughtful and diligent contributions that workgroup members provided to form the following recommendations. While the recommendations are still very **preliminary and without broader external socialization and feedback**, the group believes they are an exciting first step toward creating a high-quality, sustainable, and equitable early childhood education system.

Key Terms

The **Early Care and Education Workforce** refers to any scheduled staff member who provides a direct service to children in either a licensed home-based or center-based setting. This includes teaching staff, cleaning and cooking staff, and admin/receptionists on the program payroll, including supervisors and substitute teachers.

An **Early Childhood Educator (ECE)**, as outlined in the Unifying Framework, provides direct service to children birth through age 8. This includes educators working in child care centers as well as home based or family child care providers. Their responsibilities are to care for and promote children's learning, development, and wellbeing to establish a foundation for

lifelong learning and development. The Unifying Framework's ECE profession includes three positions (ECE I, ECE II, ECE III), which are outlined in the following section. When speaking about compensation, this report is focused on the professional role of Early Childhood Educator (ECE).

Early Childhood Educator I (ECE I): In birth through Grade 3 settings, an ECE I can help develop and sustain high-quality child development and learning environments and can serve as an effective member of early childhood education teaching teams. **An ECE I will complete a professional preparation program that meets a minimum of 120 clock hours.**

Early Childhood Educator II (ECE II): In birth through age 5 settings, an ECE II can be responsible for developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments with staffing and support models that provide frequent access to ECE IIIs for guidance. For example, ECE IIs working in larger community-based settings might have on-site supervisors, or those working in family child care homes or small centers might be a part of networks or have regular on-site technical assistance. However, in state- and district-funded preschool programs, provided in mixed-delivery settings and explicitly aligned with the K–12 public school system, ECE IIs can serve only in the support educator role; ECE IIIs must serve in the lead educator role, as in K–Grade 3 settings, where an ECE II can help develop and sustain high-quality development and learning environments, can serve as an effective member of ECE teaching teams, and can guide the practice of ECE Is. **An ECE II will complete an early childhood education associate degree program.**

Early Childhood Educator III (ECE III): In birth through Grade 3 settings, an ECE III can be responsible for independently developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environments, can serve as an effective member of ECE teaching teams, and can guide the practice of ECE Is and IIs. **An ECE III will complete an early childhood education bachelor's degree program or an early childhood education master's degree program for initial preparation.**

High-Quality Programs are healthy and safe; support children's early learning, help prepare children for their next educational step; partner with families to support and monitor children's learning and development; and advocate for providers, children, and families as indicated by NAEYC Accreditation for Early Learning Programs, NAFCC Accreditation, and/or Head Start approval.

OEC-Funded Programs refer to Smart Start, State Head Start, School Readiness and Child Day Care.

II. PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN WORKFORCE AND QUALITY

This section outlines the current problems and opportunities in Workforce and Quality. It highlights national trends, how they reflect the current state of care in Connecticut, and the OEC's existing initiatives to support the ECE workforce. For more information on the national landscape and OEC programs, see *Appendices B and C*.

A. Problem Statement

The workforce ecosystem faces a variety of complex and inter-related issues. **Despite the complexity, a clear theme is the priority of first addressing compensation** before making further adjustments throughout the system (e.g. to credentials, degrees, recruitment and retention). With that in mind, the workgroup identified the following key problem and opportunity areas:

Compensation:

ECEs have one of the lowest paying jobs in the United States. Early educators are more likely to lack health insurance and shoulder student debt than the national average, and they experience high levels of food insecurity.⁵ Nationally, more than half of child care workers receive public assistance, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.⁶ Child care wages for women of color and single mother early childhood educators nationally are even lower.⁷

The same is true in Connecticut. Compensation for Connecticut's early childhood educators is unacceptably low. Lead teachers in OEC-funded programs outside of public schools make on average \$19.54/hour; assistant teachers make \$15.28. Public school PreK programs are better compensated, with lead teachers making \$29.71/hour on average in public school, and assistant teachers making \$17.77/hour⁸. However, those in non-state funded programs typically make less.⁹ The pre-pandemic poverty rate for ECEs in Connecticut was 14%.¹⁰

The Office of Early Childhood has some programs that aim to provide temporary relief for educators, given these workforce challenges:

- **Family Child Care Union Rates: Union negotiations led to improving wages** for Family Child Care programs, and impacts other provider settings as well. The newly negotiated contract contains an 11% increase in rates for 3 years starting in SFY 2024 to enhance FCC wages. Governor Lamont is extending that 11% increase to child care centers as well.
- **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Stabilization Payments:** The OEC designed federal stabilization grants to include a 25% opt-in for centers and group homes to support staff compensation. Family Child Care grants automatically included this amount in their award.
- **Wage Supports for Early Childhood Educators:** The OEC has used **one-time state funding** to distribute \$70 million to licensed and licensed-exempt providers to be used for staff compensation in two payments over the 2023 SFY.
- The OEC used \$30 million in state federal relief funds for **enrollment grants for state-funded early childhood programs** for SFY '23 and SFY 24 to help stabilize them as enrollments lagged.

While federal stabilization funding has helped smooth some of the worst parts of the crisis during COVID-19, **problems related to lack of adequate compensation are likely going to become considerably worse as these one-time investments disappear.**

⁵ Only 21% of child care workers have employer-sponsored health insurance "Early Educator Pay & Economic Insecurity Across the States." Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. 2022. (Accessed [here](#)) and "Higher wages for child care and home health care workers," Economic Policy Institute, (Accessed [here](#))

⁶ "1 in 3 Child Care Workers Is Experiencing Food Insecurity," First Five Years Fund. (Accessed [here](#)).

⁷ Full-time, year-round pre-K/K teachers who are Black and Latina women have median wages of \$12.97 per hour and \$13.59, respectively, compared to a median cut wage of \$15.38 per hour for those who are white, non-Hispanic women. Additionally, single mothers working full-time, year-round as child care workers typically are paid \$11.01 per hour, and their counterparts who are working full-time, year-round as pre-K/K teachers are typically paid \$12.74 per hour. "The Child Care and Early Learning Workforce Is Underpaid, and Women Are Paying the Price," National Women's Law Center. (Accessed [here](#)).

⁸ 2022 OEC NIEER report submission

⁹ OEC Funded Staff Registry Data. November 2022.

¹⁰ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at University of California, Berkeley, "Connecticut State Profile," (2020). (Accessed [here](#)).

One way that the Lamont administration has been working to improve compensation and program stability and reduce the cliff is with increased funding for subsidy rate increases in the SFY 2024 and SFY 2025 budget proposal. Care4Kids (C4K) rates will increase 11% a year for three years and State-funded ECE infant and toddler rates were increased up to 50% in SFY 2023. Preschool rates are proposed to increase 18% for SFY 2025. These investments help state-funded programs and programs that rely on C4K subsidies, but do not help most programs increase their revenues to sustainably increase wages.

Professional Pathways and Technical Assistance:

ECEs care for and promote the critical learning, development, and well-being of young children. This great work requires complex competencies if we expect educators to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and development with young children and in partnership with families.

Early educators have specialized training in early literacy, numeracy, science, social and emotional learning, and the arts.¹¹ State and national career and professional development options, however, do not adequately support ECEs in gaining these skills critical to optimally supporting a child's development. For example, there is a lack of investment in professional development for educators working with infants and toddlers specifically.¹² Professionals currently face an early childhood credential or licensure pathway and a 15-step OEC career ladder that is complicated and can be challenging to navigate.

In the absence of adoption of the Unifying Framework, nationally there is no uniform or reliable professional pathway to properly credential and compensate early childhood educators. Current terms that describe early childhood educators have inconsistent meanings for their respective preparation, responsibilities, and compensation. Professional registries collect complex information that can summarize formal education and professional development for individuals and programs as well as act as a database to inform state policy. Career ladders provide a snapshot of pathways for the early childhood workforce to create their step by step goals toward the career they envision. They lack incentives or requirements for their use and do not net gains to advance the profession. Credentialing and post-secondary degrees are largely inaccessible because of the cost, lack of available time to go to school while working, and the lack of pay differential with each degree level. Even if individuals do progress up a state's career ladder, they often find themselves earning the same wages, with the same work responsibilities (or more), as they had prior.

In Connecticut, some family child care educators face barriers to attaining quality professional development that leads to increased business security and quality teacher training.¹³ Accessing these resources requires complicated steps, and resulting credentials do not lead to substantive wage increases. **The current reality further marginalizes those who do not have the power and privilege to easily access and navigate this complex system.**¹⁴

The Office of Early Childhood has created and funded a set of Technical Assistance (TA) and PD opportunities for educators:

¹¹ As the Harvard Center on the Developing Child states, early childhood "experiences shape the process that determines whether a child's brain will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. High-quality education for children yields long-term benefits for students, including reduced likelihood to repeat grades, increased odds of graduating from high school, and higher earnings in the workforce. [Experiences Build Brain Architecture - Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](#)

¹² Whitebook, M. and Ryan, S. (2011). Degrees in context: Asking the right questions about preparing skilled and effective teachers of young children. National Institute for Early Education Research and Center for the Study of Child Care Employment Preschool Policy Brief. (Accessed [here](#)).

¹³ CT OEC Survey of Family child care Providers. 2022.

¹⁴ CT OEC Survey of Family child care Providers. 2022

- The [Early Childhood Professional Registry to access scholarship and online training](#) is a statewide, secure, online database that tracks verified professional development and employment experience of its members.¹⁵ It serves as the application portal for [OEC scholarship](#), Head Teacher licensing, Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC), Qualified Workforce Incentive (QWI), and technical assistance providers. It provides access to free unlimited online training. Staff provide guidance to individuals on resources to advance individual plans of study.
- The Connecticut Association for Young Children (CTAAYC) and Regional Education Service Centers (RES-C) deliver [Technical Assistance](#) on topics including accreditation and program improvement ([Accreditation Quality Improvement Support - AQIS](#)), housing insecurity and homelessness supports, and standards, curriculum, and assessment training.
- [Staffed Family Child Care Networks \(SFCCNs\)](#) are community initiatives with experienced paid staff that offer ongoing support services and resources to home based care and education providers.
- [Elevate](#), the state's quality improvement system, supports provider growth through reflection and goal-setting at the program level. Service Navigators guide program leaders to connect with professional development and technical assistance based on their unique needs, including planning for professional learning for the staff at large as well as for each individual educator. Resources and tools to support program improvement target staff recruitment and retention, the learning environment, community resources for children and families, business management, and child development. Notably, Connecticut's Elevate system has taken a different approach than a typical quality improvement system based on points, checklists, and ratings by outside observers. Elevate leverages national accreditation standards with a focus on support over compliance to help providers grow from where they are and strengthen connections with children, families, staff, and their community.
- [Business Support](#): The OEC seized a unique opportunity during the pandemic to contract with the Women's Business Development Council to provide training and technical assistance to OEC's licensed and aspiring providers. Business training, individualized business support plans, grants and incentives are all available through this partnership which finally formally acknowledges the need for Connecticut's child care businesses to be sustainable and healthy.

Recruitment and Retention:

A lack of adequate preparation—and compensation—results in significant turnover in the early care and education field. Estimates range from between 30 to 60 percent in annual turnover for ECEs.¹⁶ This churn is a major factor in early care and education's unprecedented workforce shortage. The churn also impacts program quality and the ability for children to develop trusting and consistent relationships with those who care for them.

Classrooms across CT are closed due to lack of staffing; there are waiting lists of families needing care.¹⁷ This shortage limits early care and education options for working families and decreases the quality of care an overworked and undercompensated professional can provide.

¹⁵ The Registry captures data including course credit and degree attainment, career ladder level, occupation, role, program details, and funding sources.

¹⁶ This turnover rate is 3 times that of public school teachers. Child Care at a Breaking Point: The Cost for Parents to Work. CT Association for Human Services. (Accessed [here](#))

¹⁷ Of a set of survey center-based programs, 222 classrooms either closed or had limited enrollment, with a reported 3266 fewer children being served than pre-pandemic. Projected across the industry there are over 24,000 Connecticut child care spaces out of commission due to a lack of staff. Child Care at a Breaking Point: The Cost for Parents to Work. CT Association for Human Services. (Accessed [here](#)); "Child Care Waiting List Crisis," CT Mirror, (Accessed [here](#)).

Additionally, the complexity of existing recruitment pathways creates structural barriers to increasing the educator pipeline. Nationally, students entering the field have to navigate the multitude and complexity of ECE degree programs. In CT, entry level requirements, qualification expectations, and teacher definitions vary across ECE programs, making transferring credentials across programs or sectors challenging.¹⁸ This complexity can deter students and create too narrow a path for graduates. These challenges are magnified by structural barriers, including difficulty recruiting faculty to teach night and weekend classes, difficulty providing child care during class, lack of classes offered in Spanish and other languages, lack of mentorship for students of color and lack of instructors of color, and inadequate capacity for cohort models and career services.¹⁹

The OEC has several initiatives underway to help mitigate these barriers:

- **Qualified Workforce Incentives** (QWI) give cash awards directly to eligible teaching staff in OEC-funded licensed centers and group homes (soon to expand to teaching staff in all OEC licensed centers and group homes; licensed family homes taking Care 4 Kids are eligible for bonuses via the union agreement). Eligible staff are those who have attained credentials at varying levels.
- The **Scholarship Assistance program** provides scholarships for educators employed in Connecticut early care and education settings who are pursuing an early childhood higher education degree or credential, or who seek eligible training to improve competency as an early childhood professional. Awards cover all tuition, fees, and textbooks for credit based courses, making student loans unnecessary.
- **Apprenticeships and Workforce Pipeline Pilot**: The CT Department of Labor (DOL) and the OEC in collaboration with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), worked together to approve an official Registered Apprenticeship with the DOL for family child care providers. In 2022, the OEC directed ARP funds toward a pilot program, with the goal of developing strategies and best practices for building the workforce in alignment with the NAEYC Unifying Framework. Eight ECE sites across the state are participating and have completed surveys at the midpoint of the program, with a follow-up survey coming at program end in late June. Currently, the OEC is distilling lessons learned from the program and will develop strategies for moving the work forward. The Connecticut General Assembly recently earmarked \$2.5 million in each of the next two fiscal years towards this work. These two efforts are worthy of consideration as strategies to feed the pipeline leading to the ECE I role.

While the OEC has made some strides to address problems in the ECE workforce, they have not been systemic and have not been nearly enough to create a sustainable workforce. These challenges, of course, are not unique to Connecticut and exist across states in the US. **Compensation is key to the recruitment and retention of a high-quality workforce. Strategies to increase compensation will be the catalyst to creating a robust, accessible, and equitable child care and education system for all Connecticut families.**

B. Opportunity Statement

The quality of a child's early education is directly tied to the skills and knowledge of their early childhood educators and program leaders. When children are cared for outside the home, a high-quality, well compensated, and diverse early care and education workforce is the single most important key to optimal early development. To support families' diverse needs,

¹⁸ 2022 Task Force to Analyze and Make Recommendations on Issues Relating to Early Childhood Workforce Development. (Accessed [here](#)) + Focus Groups with family child care providers conducted by Social Finance in March 2023.

¹⁹ Preparing a Profession: Perspectives of Higher Education Leaders on the Future of the Early Childhood Education Workforce. NAEYC. 2021. (Accessed [here](#))

educators need the ability to create close family partnerships and have a strong grasp on all domains of development and learning, including social and emotional development, cognitive learning, and child assessment.

First and foremost, opportunities for advancing new recommendations must start with a path forward to appropriate compensation. Compensation is key to creating sustainable and quality jobs for ECE professionals. Without adequate compensation, it will be difficult to successfully implement other recommendations.

We have an opportunity to support the current and future ECE workforce by revising and simplifying the career ladder. As indicated further in the recommendations, we propose doing this by utilizing the [Unifying Framework levels of Early Childhood Educators](#). The Unifying framework is a product of a collaboration of 15 national organizations and leaders in the ECE field, and formalizes the profession with three levels of Early Childhood Educators - ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III. Adopting this framework will allow Connecticut to leverage this national work, in alignment with our systems building principles. By doing so, CT would give educators' credentials currency that is portable, and would also unify institutions of higher education with a clear direction for ECE degree programs.

In adopting the Unifying Framework, we will create clear pathways for the existing workforce. We must honor and support the existing workforce with resources to bridge the gap between where we are and where we must go as a profession. *For more information on the Unifying Framework, see Appendix D.*

III. WORKFORCE AND QUALITY GUIDE POSTS

This report builds on the recommendations of the Equity and Access workgroup by underscoring how inequity is undermining Connecticut's ability to fulfill families' needs for ECE that supports children's learning and parents' ability to work. A well-qualified, appropriately compensated ECE workforce is a key part of the solution to ensuring equitable access to an ECE system that provides high-quality early education for all children. Such a system will lead to higher high school graduation completion, more post-secondary degrees, asset accumulation, and avoidance of the criminal justice system.²⁰ And as parents feel confident that their children have reliable, high-quality early care, they are more reliable and focused at work, enhancing productivity.

While these recommendations are for publicly-funded programs, the long term goal is to impact the entire early childhood education market. The OEC acknowledges that significant policy changes will be needed to offer equitable and sufficient compensation for early childhood educators, who are critical to the well-being, education, and development of Connecticut's children.

A. Foundational Documents

Unifying Framework:

The working group has chosen to build on the foundation created by the Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession and the [Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators](#) held by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The workgroup chose to ground its recommendations on this

²⁰A Multicomponent, Preschool to Third Grade Preventive Intervention and Educational Attainment at 35 Years of Age. Reynolds AJ, Ou SR, Temple JA. JAMA Pediatr. 2018 Jan 29. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.4673.

framework because we believe in the power and value of this multi-year, professional-led effort to address current inequities in early childhood education. We also believe we can align with other states and with other professions if we implement a common framework.

The Unifying Framework establishes a national framework for career pathways, preparation, competencies, responsibilities, and compensation.²¹ A central tenet of the Unifying Framework is a streamlined approach to credentials in the ECE workforce that includes three levels (ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III), discussed further in the recommendations section of this brief. The OEC leveraged this structure to form the core of the compensation schedule, with additional reforms added to be reflective of the current field and OEC Career Ladder. *See Appendix D for the executive summary or read the full report [here](#).*

2022 Taskforce on Early Childhood Workforce Development:

In 2022, the state created a taskforce to analyze and make recommendations on issues relating to early childhood workforce development (Public Act 21-171). The task force represented key state stakeholders in the early care and education space and invited national leaders to lend their expertise as well. This workgroup used this task force's learnings to build our recommendations and will continue to draw upon their work.²² *See Appendix D for the executive summary or read the full report [here](#).*

2023 Compensation Schedule Report:

Tasked by the state, a workgroup of OEC staff developed an early childhood educator compensation schedule for lead teachers employed by State-funded programs (Public Act 19-61). The recommendations include an entry level, minimum salary schedule, and accompanying benefits for early childhood educators.²³ The current compensation schedule contains five levels of compensation; should the BRP agree with the recommendation to pursue the three levels of the Unifying Framework and any other levels needed to represent current workforce status, this schedule must be updated accordingly.²⁴ *See Appendix D for the executive summary or read the full report [here](#).*

These three foundational documents were critical to the goals and recommendations outlined in the following section.

²¹ The Unifying framework is a product of a collaboration of 15 national organizations and leaders in the ECE field.

²² The taskforce examined and made recommendations on (1) equity-based practices in early childhood education preparation and professional development; (2) ways to address inequity in access to employment and compensation; (3) the feasibility of creating a new co-authored license that would offer multiple levels of flexibility to address the range of ages, settings and roles in the early childhood field, and (4) workforce demands in the state related to the need for early childhood educators providing early care and education services for infants and toddlers and children up to ages six, seven or eight. Taskforce to Analyze and Make Recommendations on Issues Relating to Early Childhood Workforce Development (March 2023) (Accessed [here](#))

²³ The proposed salary schedule provides guidance to state-funded programs to meet minimum compensation and accompanying benefit recommendations for ECE educators to help sustain the workforce.

²⁴ This schedule and associated report was then socialized throughout 2022 and eventually submitted to the Education Committee as well as the House Clerk, Senate Clerk, State Library, Office of Legislative Research, and Office of Fiscal Analysis in December 2022. (Accessed [here](#))

IV. PRELIMINARY DRAFT GOALS AND RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS

Over the last two months, the Workforce and Quality workgroup drafted these recommendations in weekly workgroup sessions. They build on the workgroup’s foundational documents and aim to address what systems and policy changes are needed to reach the workgroup's goals and subgoals.

These recommendations are **preliminary and without external socialization**; the workgroup will assimilate feedback from the public sharing session and BRP members as well as other stakeholders to prioritize the most promising high impact recommendations and properly recognize ideas that overlap with other workgroups. To continue pushing this work forward, the workgroup will **conduct additional analysis** to confirm and refine prioritized strategies, including detailing any required structural, programmatic, or regulatory changes, investments needed, expected timeline, and outcomes.

The workgroup places its recommendations in the context of this **Foundational Recommendation: In conjunction and consistent with the Unifying Framework’s structure, we do not make other recommendations without first addressing a path forward to appropriate compensation.**

Workforce and Quality Goal: Develop and sustain equity-driven, skilled, diverse professional lead educators and program leaders that are prepared and fairly compensated to meet the early childhood education needs of the state’s children and families.

Compensation	
<p>Compensation Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and implement approaches for professional salaries and benefits across roles and settings. Assess current credential workforce requirements and align them with each other and with early childhood compensation. Identify strategies to close the gap in workforce compensation as set forward in the OEC compensation study. 	
Recommendation	Steps to Achieve Recommendation
<p>Update the existing CT Compensation Schedule Report to build a compensation plan which utilizes a true cost of care study</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out a compensation plan over a 3-year period that leverages state, local, business and philanthropy funds to support wage and benefits increases. Begin implementation of the compensation schedule with OEC-funded programs to influence the conditions in the rest of the market (e.g., quality, equity and compensation). Estimate costs of implementation and identify funding. Support programs in identifying ways to enhance their business revenue and reduce costs, including through optimizing enrollment and reducing administrative burdens. Use pending increases in C4K subsidy rates to support ECE staff as compensation is advanced. Assess the wage data before and after rate increases to State funded sites in 2023 and 2024 to understand the impact of rate increases and calculate the rates required to achieve professional salaries for staff across CT. Encourage full enrollment and require C4K applications for families in state funded programs to enhance revenue for these programs to support wages.
<p>Adopt the three educator level roles (ECE I, II and III) defined in the Unifying Framework and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt definitions of the three roles for ECE professionals whose scope of practice can be found in the Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators:

<p>establish compensation requirements that are aligned with the government-funded reimbursement rates for state funded early childhood programs tied to ECE I, II and III requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ECE I: An ECE I will complete a professional preparation program that meets a minimum hours trained requirement for certificate achievement.. ○ ECE II: An ECE II will complete an early childhood education associate degree program. ○ ECE III: An ECE III will complete an early childhood education bachelor’s degree program or an early childhood education master’s degree program for initial preparation. ● Tie required specialties and certifications to degree programs and meaningful compensation changes. ● Assess the fiscal impact of adopting the Unifying Framework and various general policies such as requiring an AA or BA.
<p>Consider strategies for improved benefits in the compensation package (PTO, health care, dental and vision, retirement, etc.) and explore nontraditional benefit options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore options for nontraditional benefits such as housing or early care and education subsidies for ECE staff (i.e., OEC direct approval for early care and education), paid planning time, etc. ● Explore benefits of cooperative health care plans and coordinated support for CT Health Care Exchange for programs.
<p>Socialize the importance of the structure of the profession and its value to families and to children’s development in connection with increased compensation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make the connection for families that “the early years matter” and integrate education for families on the structure and value of the profession into how they find care. ● Develop partnerships with the CT business community and other state departments to encourage employers to implement family friendly policies that support the BRP’s proposal for structuring and financing childhood education. ● Consider how Elevate marketing efforts can support marketing of the high value of ECE.

Professional Pathways and Technical Assistance (PPTA)

PPTA Goals:

- PPTA System Structure and Design
 - Shift from the CT career ladder to the Unifying Framework by revising to reflect the adopted ECE I, ECE II, ECE III roles, represent licensure levels, and the current workforce in a simplified way with incentives and support embedded.
 - Provide in-service professional development, technical assistance, and resources to ensure staff can continuously support optimal child development and parent engagement and improve outreach efforts and communication across the field.
 - Design programming that places cultural competence and equity at the forefront and meets the needs of a diverse workforce, including multilingual access and support with opportunities for advancement
 - Define and support the role of ECE leadership in driving program quality improvement.

Recommendation	Steps to Achieve Recommendation
<p>Restructure Connecticut early childhood credentialing and certification systems into an ECE Professional Licensure system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accredit all CT early childhood higher education degree programs with the NAEYC higher education system, and align classes with the three levels of the profession (ECE I, II, III). Articulate seamlessly with the key assessments aligned among 2yr and 4yr colleges for transferability.

<p>(OEC and SDE) to align with the Unifying Framework²⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop licensure pathways to align with ECE I, II, III standards and ensure standardization and transferability across sectors while recognizing and sustaining a workforce that may not exactly match a new licensure system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage legislative higher education committee to review higher education statutes/regulations for areas that cause barriers to access, affordability, and flexibility in attaining a degree. ○ Support development of ECE leadership pathway built from the ECE educator pathway inclusive of assessing prior experience for credit, credit-based coursework, and ongoing in-service support. ○ Explore the potential to compensate students for practicum work ○ Support Lab Schools/Higher Ed Placement Institutions to provide necessary experience hours to meet NAEYC expectations. ○ Learn from the existing registered apprenticeship program and look to expand the apprenticeship model. ○ Develop workforce training projects in the field as an introductory method leading to ECE I.
<p>Utilize the NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies as the basis for designing OEC-developed and/or sponsored professional development pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Align state professional learning offerings with NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies, CCDF connections, and CT’s quality improvement system, known as Elevate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create specific offerings for ECE leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide training, incentives, and professional development that ensures leaders have the competencies to ensure economic viability of early care and education businesses (e.g., business supports, SFCCNs, shared service models). ■ Offer business professional development support to help program leaders increase enrollment, support staff, and identify alternate sources of revenue (e.g., subsidized, and free space, community partnerships).
<p>Fund the Professional Pathways and Technical Assistance System (PPTA) (including higher education and in-service learning) to expand infrastructure and support high quality professional learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hire additional staff to ensure successful execution of the PPTA System (e.g., outreach, data collection/analysis, lead PD/TA designer to work across divisions, IT for CANVAS and Protraxx). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assure outreach to the field so staff can take advantage of the system. ● Ensure the PPTA System includes the following foundational principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accessibility for all – flexible due dates and hours/options for training, 2nd language offerings. ○ Affordability for all – scholarships and compensated training time. ○ System Design and Delivery – equitable, culturally informed, meets the needs of the profession and is data-informed. ○ Quality Assurance Built-In - to inform continuous quality improvement of the system itself and its members. ○ Expand Coaching and Mentoring Support/Development Systems for diverse array of needs - Career Navigators, Peer-Peer Mentors, and Coaches for Directors who are aware of all opportunities for ECE. ● Simplify the career ladder to focus on three levels and also represent current workforce status to align with Unifying Framework, with pathways to achieve levels.

²⁵ With consideration of the 2023 recommendations to the legislature by the Taskforce on Early Childhood Workforce Development

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct a review of Registry modifications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Require up-to-date accounts (education and employment) of all teaching and administrative leadership staff in the field to (a) better depict Connecticut’s early care and education workforce on the career ladder and (b) connect providers to the formal education and informal professional development pathways available through the Registry (scholarship, training, incentives, etc.) ○ Connect Registry as one stop shop for ECE professionals in OEC’s data system to improve visibility of offerings.
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Recruitment and Retention

<p>Recruitment and Retention Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define policies, programs, and pathways to support positive marketing, recruitment strategies, and support for a skilled, diverse incoming ECE workforce ● Build long-term recruitment and retention strategies which will increase the staff pipeline into ECE careers

Recruitment

Recommendation	Steps to Achieve Recommendation
Expand the introduction of ECE as a respected, desirable profession in high school (and even before) to build interest, understanding, knowledge, and opportunities such as Apprenticeships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognize ECE as a distinct professional field of practice different from other child-focused work and education, with a distinct set of roles, knowledge base, and scope of practice (in connection with Unifying Framework). ● Utilize opportunities that the OEC and partner agencies provide (state and national) - Week of the Young Child, Teacher Appreciation week, OEC events; share with the public the number of current NAEYC accredited programs in CT, The number that achieved renewal, the number of newly accredited program, etc. ● Consider working with SDE to have Child Development count as a Science class in high schools across CT ● Build apprenticeship models which start in highschoools
Leverage directors as leaders who serve as the face of recruitment in their programs and are the key driver for retention (for programs and for the broader field)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider using “cohorts” of directors to support each other and requiring regular supervision with the purpose of strengthening skills which will then strengthen the staff/program practices. ● Provide support or structure for directors to plan for retirement and succession. ● Create a structure for existing leaders to transfer knowledge to emerging leaders.
Implement marketing strategies to attract individuals into the ECE field and promote incentives to bring people from other fields into ECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use Registry data capabilities to understand who is leaving the field and who is coming into it to inform outreach and support needs. ● Create pathways, which are financially supported, for more experienced professionals to join the field, earn credentials, and advance. ● Collaborate with institutions of higher education to build retention strategies for ECE programs and to keep individuals in the field.

Retention

Include retention-focused benefits in the compensation package (PTO, health care,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure benefits which are specifically focused on retention such as healthcare and retirement; Consider loan forgiveness, automatic eligibility for C4K, etc.
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<p>dental and vision, retirement, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remove barriers to earning funds while individuals are earning credentials/student teaching/internships in order to increase access for individuals passionate about ECE. ● Consider a program which would allow teachers who work at NAEYC accredited programs to earn ECE educators' credentials at a community college and then a state 4-year college for free. ● For recognition to honor achievement of credentials and accreditation consider additional opportunities for recognition (including monetary recognition), such as the annual recognition of accredited programs as part of the CTAEYC annual conference.
<p>Follow/adopt payscale that has mobility and steps for experience with ongoing professional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Align payscale with Unifying Framework, and ensure current staff in between levels ECE I, II, and III feel supported through outreach, resources, and mentoring to increase the likelihood of retention.
<p>Create career pathways which utilize partnerships with colleges to give credits toward achieving a credential or a degree while working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce current barriers in student teaching and field experiences. ● Strengthen the connection between the Early Childhood Lab School project and the student teaching structure to reduce barriers in student teaching and field experiences.